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ABSTRACT

The recent literature concerning mid-life transitions of men and the impact upon their personal and interpersonal lives is reviewed. Areas of concern addressed by these materials include adult development, issues and tasks of mid-life, and life phases. A framework for evaluation and therapeutic intervention is provided for counselors and helping professionals with an emphasis on identity, continuity, community, activity, play, existentiality, and health. (Author)

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Males in Mid-Life Transitions: Implications for Counseling Strategies*

Herbert G. Lingren**

This paper reviews the recent literature and discussion concerning the mid-life transitions of men and its impact upon their personal and interpersonal lives. It examines some of the issues and tasks that men and their significant others must come to grips with. Finally, it suggests a construct of (1) identity; (2) continuity; (3) community; (4) activity; (5) play; (6) existentiality; and (7) health which provides a framework for evaluation and therapeutic intervention.

We were born in the depression era of the 30's, grew up during World War II; graduated from high school and went to Korea. The "steady state" decade had begun. We went to college, met the girl of our dreams, got married, found a job, and settled down to begin the life of bliss, or so we anticipated. The woman was the homemaker, and the man the provider. She watched "As the World Turns," he watched "Gunsmoke" and "Perry Mason." We had four children, the ideal number during the late 50's and early 60's. We moved, because that was how we got better jobs.

During the 1960's, changes began to take place, in society and in our family life. Some we didn't understand, but we plodded along after our "dream." Our marriage was not as fresh--we were loving less and enjoying it less. What's happening anyway? We are tired from working, from working around the home, from hassling with the children. We watch TV, we work harder, and we become bored. Our wives complain that we aren't home enough. She is bored, she wants

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to go to work, or finish college. "Sure, sure!" Somehow, it seems as if nothing is going right. We are passed up for promotion. Our kids are never home and don't listen or pay attention when they are. Our wives are excited about work and seem more turned on by it than by us. We feel pressure and demands from every direction. We feel a loss of control, like falling into a bottomless pit. Suddenly, everything seems like a terrific struggle--with our children, our marriage, on the job. We are 40! We have achieved what Erikson has called the time of "generativity," a ripe stage of human existence. What does this mean? We don't feel "ripe," but "rotten." Maybe we don't even feel. We are supposed to be "on top of the world," yet we feel flat. We feel locked-in, trapped. We realize we are not going to make it to the top like we anticipated at age 25. Is it really worth it? We wonder what other men feel and think. Of course, we don't ask because that isn't the way men do things. Yet, we feel tired, have backaches, our hair is turning gray. Our waist size is almost our chest size. WOW! We begin to count about how many years we have left to live. We read--Sheehey's Passages; Levinson's Seasons of a Man's Life; Vaillant's Adaptation to Life. They say you are in mid-life transition. Mid-wife, what? No, no! Mid-life transition. "What's that? I thought only women experienced mid-life change. What does this mean? Is it normal? How do I escape? How do I cope?"

Mid-Life Transitions

Levinson (1976), Gould (1979), Bridges (1979), Irwin (1975), Zussman (1971), Goldfarb (1973), Neugarten (1968) have suggested that most men do go through some period of considerable inner turmoil when they have fundamental doubts about various aspects of their lives. They agree that the mid-life transition (MLT) is not a period of stability and certainty as has often been assumed, but

of change, stress, potential growth, restructuring, loss and renewal. They would also agree, I think, that it is not a "male climacteric," which I would label as too mythical, connoting a simple explanation for something exceedingly complex. In addition to the hormonal changes which are occurring, also involved is the physical aging process, changes in self, social roles, and interpersonal relationships, all of which are converging at a time when stresses appear to become particularly difficult to cope with anyway.

Levinson, et.al. (1978) referred to the male MLT as a "developmental transition," a strategic turning point in a man's life. It is a stressful time which involves giving up the stable life structure of an earlier stage to explore the tasks of the new period.

Vincent (1972) describes the MLT period from a more psychological and behavioral perspective of an "uncomfortable position." He portrays the people in it as the "caught generation."

> "If you are between 35 and 55 years old, you are caught in-between the demands of youth and the expectations of the elderly. The respect you were taught to give your parents may have been denied you by your children. The threat of 'love withdrawal' used by your parents to keep you in line as a boy, may now be used by your children to keep you in line as a parent. As a child, you were to be seen and not heard, now as a parent, you may feel you are neither seen nor heard." (p. 1)

Neugarten (1979) however, disagrees in that men in MLT are not caught in the middle; that they are freer in this period than ever before. She indicates that if there are new tasks of adaptation, it is due to a shift in time perspective; when a man starts counting the time left to live rather than the number of years since his birth. She prefers we talk about a fluid life cycle and "different consciousnesses" of life, rather than the MLT as a developmental stage.

Gould (1979) suggests that the MLT may represent a "trade-off" between risk-taking, vitality, and security; that many large organization men develop

satisfactory personal and family lives in their 30's and 40's and yet seem dissatisfied when the enter their 50's.

Bridges (1979) on the other hand, characterized the MLT as a return to open-mindedness, like that of a late adolescent but with 20 years more experience and much more information from several different perspectives. While the task of the 20's transition is to become independent and competent, the task of MLT is remodeling. It is a time of honoring, of searching, of taking risks. The reframing which needs to be done in the MLT depends on how much developmental work was accomplished during the earlier stages.

Brim (1976) refers to the MLT as a period of "crisis," particularly if several problems are occurring simultaneously. If, for example, "a man throws off his illusions about achieving his 'dream' and the great success that goes with it; if he buries one of his parents and begins to yield to the truth of his mortality; if he recognizes that his sexual vigor and indeed interest, are declining, and even finds relief in that fact; then there is a crisis." (p. 8)

Comments such as the following are typical of the difficulty men experience in MLT. "I can't seem to shake the feeling of being fenced in." "What's the use, I'm trapped in a job I've had for 20 years and I'm getting nowhere." "I can't concentrate or remember things the way I used to." "I feel insecure, pessimistic about my pension and life savings, but I can't figure out why." "My wife enjoys her job more than me, my kids have their own friends; have I been only a paycheck?" "I'm always afraid something dangerous is going to happen. Maybe that's why I drink so much. When I see those bags under my eyes, I know I've had it. I'm not going anyplace except to the cemetery."

Are these statements characteristic of all men in MLT? Probably not, but they seem to be the rule as often as the exception. Some have described the MLT as a time for eliciting exuberance, excitement, renewed energy with an

increase in life satisfaction, while others refer to it as a confrontation with existential terror and psychosocial decline (Neugarten, 1968, 1976, 1979); Schlossberg, Troll and Leibowitz (1978); Lowenthall, Thurner, Chiriboga, & Associates (1975); Rosenberg & Farrell (1975); Bardwick (1975); Jacques (1965); and Gould (1978). Levinson (1978) probably sums it up when he characterizes the MLT as occurring whether or not the individual succeeds or fails in his search for affirmation by society. "At 38, he thinks that if he gains the deserved success, he will be all set. The answer is, he will not; it is only the form that varies. The central issue is not whether he succeeds or fails in achieving his goals. The issue, rather, is what to do with the experience of <u>disparity</u> between what he has gained in an inner sense from living within a particular structure, and what he wants for himself. This incongruence between 'what I've reached at this point' and 'what it is I really want' instigates a soul-searching for 'what I really want." (p. 37)

Usually, a "marker" event, such as the death of a parent or loss of job triggers this time of re-evaluation and restructuring (Levinson, 1976 & 1978). Vines (1979) however, suggests that it may be the interaction between this developmental stage of life and a chronic conflict-producing situation (e.g. high marital conflict) that acts as a catalyst to start the MLT. Hitherto tolerable but real problem situations become intolerable, with a sense of renewed pressure to "change my life before it is too late."

Do all men have a MLT? If so, is the trauma mild or severe? Why do some men cope with this transition better than others? While the answers to some of these questions may await further research, I will present what several writers in the field have discovered about men in MLT and the necessary developmental tasks of this period. Then, I will suggest a framework that may be used in analyzing the impact of this experience on men's lives. Finally, I will suggest implications for counselors about how to approach your client with strategies

that might relieve or remedy the situation. A recommendation will be made about preventive programs which may reduce the intensity of the experience in the future.

Issues and Tasks at Mid-Life

Erikson (1950) gave primary emphasis to "generativity vs. stagnation" as a stage of ego development in the middle years. Jacques (1965) said that the central issue at mid-life was coming to terms with one's own mortality: a man must learn now, more deeply than was possible before, that his own death is inevitable. Wolfenstein (1966) proposed that the reworking of a "destructiveness" is the basic process of transformation. Neugarten (1968) identified the basic life issue as a growing "interiority"; turning inward to the self, decreasing the emphasis on mastery of the environment and enjoying living in the present. Jung (1965) first proposed the distinction between the first and second half of life, with around forty as the meridian. He suggested that a new effort at individuation begins at mid-life and continues through the remaining years with the object of development of the Self. He also suggested that for the man, the task at mid-life was the integration of the anima, the feminine principle.

Levinson (1978) proposed three major tasks to be worked on during MLT.

1. Termination of Early Adulthood. Man has to review his life in this era and reappraise what he has done with it. He must discover how much of it has been based on illusions, and he is faced with the task of 'de-illusionment.' This process involves diverse feelings with many possible outcomes.

2. Initiation of Middle Adulthood. Man must begin to modify the negative elements of the present structure and to test new choices. The emphasis shifts from the past to the future and a man must make choices that will modify the existing life structure and provide the central elements for a new one. It means significant changes in the external aspects of the life structure (e.g., occupational change, marriage re-modeling, or divorce, remarriage, a marked decline in his level of functioning, creativity, etc.). This task also brings significant

changes in the internal aspects of his life, such as his personal values, issues of special urgency, and what he wants for the world and himself.

3. Deal With the Polarities Which Produce Division in Life. One key process is individuation, which refers to the changes in a person's relationship to himself and to the external world. Resolving the four polarities of mid-life individuation is the principle task. These are: (1) Young-Old; (2) Destruction/Creation; (3) Masculine/Feminine; and (4) Attachment/Separateness.

   (1) Young/Old: To make sense of this condition of in-between.
   (2) Destruction/Creation: To become aware of the ways that experiences and persons have been destructive and hurtful; to become creative in new ways, contributing to human welfare.
   (3) Masculine/Feminine: To come to terms with the co-existence of the masculine and feminine parts of the self; to the integration of those parts.
   (4) Attachment/Separateness: To integrate his need for attachment to others with his antithetical but equally important need for separateness. (p. 197 to 198)

Jung (1964), Erikson (1950), Wolfenstein (1966), Neugarten (1976) and Jacques (1965), all seem basically to agree with Levinson in that every developmental transition presents a new opportunity for integration. To the extent that a man does this, he creates a firmer basis for his life in the ensuing phase. To the extent that he fails, he forms inner barriers that will be reflected as flaws in his next life-phase.

Gould (1979) identified three somewhat similar MLT life issues:

1. Mortality: The confrontation with one's own inevitable death; a time when a man has the frightening realization that the years are passing and when he mourns for the things he has not done and for the experience he has not had. It is a time of realization that one's future is not endless and simultaneously, that his short future has a frighteningly unvarying script--of years passing unpunctuated by events of great moment; that time and opportunity are shrinking. At mid-life, we must open up the "trap-door" of our experiental existence of mortality and let things become more relative as the absolutes drop away.

2. End of the Dream: It is a time to encounter the "nevers" that the "dream" is not what was expected. Characteristically, men have worked, married, and became fathers. During mid-life, they will determine if they have succeeded or failed, risen or stagnated, found direction or drifted, and they will feel the tremendous responsibility for the outcome of their lives--for

creating meaning where there has been none.

3. Rediscovery of the Spiritual Dimension: Someone has said that you meet God twice in a lifetime; at the end and somewhere around the middle. For many men, the mid-life period is empty and devoid of meaning. It is like being "existentially missing in action"; the fire in one's soul has burned down to ashes.

Relationship to Childhood

The Grant Study of Adult Development, about which Vaillant (1978) most recently wrote, found a link between the quality of a man's childhood experiences and his adaptability to stress. The quality of adaptation is related to the quality of life we have because the quality of adaptation is linked to whether we develop and use "immature" as opposed to "mature" defense mechanisms during our childhood, adolescence and on into adulthood. The frequency of immature defense mechanisms was significantly higher among men with "poor" marriages and the divorcing group of men than those with "good" marriages. Men who throughout their lives continued to find satisfaction in their marriages and were much more likely to enjoy good overall adjustment, to enjoy their jobs and to be successful in their careers. Likewise, men who consistently saw their marriages and sexual adjustment as "poor" were likely to be more depressed, passive, lacking in job success, and to be heavy users of alcohol and sedatives.

Framework for Analysis

Based upon this discussion of male MLT and the issues and tasks that a man faces, I will describe a seven-concept model which should serve as an appropriate example for evaluation and intervention strategies. Briefly, these concepts are as follows:

1. Identity: There is a loss of self esteem and an identity confusion among men in MLT. The question of "Who am I?" needs to be re-examined. Answering it may mean the development of a changing awareness of the

self, and of what a person believes. For men especially, it may mean learning to express his feelings for the first time. It may mean expressing what he wants and desires from the rest of his life, and how he will go about removing that disparity between what he wants and what he has.

Jacques (1965) and Rosenberg & Farrell (1975) found that males in our culture during MLT often become absorbed in the issue of whether their lives are over and some men declare that their existence is like a "living death." They suggest a "syndrome of psychosocial decline" in which men became increasingly separate from their families, friends, jobs and communities. They revealed a general malaise and escalation of concern with illness, disability and death. Yet, men may alternate in their beliefs in the possibility of a future and cling to the hope that "rebirth" is imminent. A new awakening to individual strengths and unique capabilities seems indicated.

For some there seems to be a reversal, not only in role, but in the emotional balance of the marital dyad. The husband was seen less and less as the source of strength and wisdom. He generally moved toward increased denial and authoritarian rigidity in his attempts to deal with his feelings and control his environment. Therefore, an awareness of his increasing defensiveness and knowledge of immature defense mechanisms is crucial in understanding and assisting him in his identity crisis, and with the "decline syndrome" in general. A rejuvination and renewal program to help him regain his self-esteem and identity seems indicated.

2. Continuity: There is a need at MLT for a man to have a sense of where he has been, where he is now, and where he is going. This means "taking stock" of himself, of his Dream and the realization of whether his achievements have fallen short of his aspirations. The MLT has been

described as "the crisis of generativity" (the sense of having contributed to future generations through offspring, creativity, work productivity) and the "crisis of ego integrity" (the acceptance of his own life as meaningful and right). Failure to resolve the first of these two crises produced feelings of stagnation, worthlessness, and personal impoverishment. Failure to resolve the second results in feelings of despair and a fear of death. Vines (1979) indicated that one major task for the therapist may be to help him "repair" a poor childhood because it is linked with maladaptive defense mechanisms, and unsatisfactory marriage and sexual relationships. Berman et.al. (1977) suggests the need for life review and the setting of long-term and short-term goals as well as dealing with maladaptive behaviors.

3. Community: The MLT evaluation includes asking about how nurturing and life-enhancing are a man's support systems? Vaillant (1978) reported that no single longitudinal variable predicted the mental health of a man over a period of time as clearly as his capacity (or luck) to build and maintain a satisfying marriage. How a man described his marriage over the years predicted his career success and his perception of his own happiness.

This suggests that one task for the therapist is to examine the competency of his skills used in creating and maintaining the husband-wife relationship. How proficient is he in communication skills, conflict management skills, individual and marital growth skills? Can he eliminate the barriers to intimacy and sexual satisfaction? The therapeutic strategy at this point may be to help the couple reframe and renew their relationship. Or, it may be to help them lower their expectations and live with what they have because of the historicity of their marriage; they have "survived together." Rosenberg and Farrell (1975) and Bardwick (1975) found that many men are actively withdrawing from external contacts and

moving toward increasing isolation from male friendship groups. This re-evaluation of and withdrawal from his significant support system often occurs at the same time that he is "launching" his children into the world, and consequently, he is experiencing the "loss" of several connections, including the loss of his wife into the world of work. While the man during MLT may be "returning home" to his family as the major locus of his concern, often his wife and children are "moving away." At the same time he is being eclipsed by his wife as the controlling force in family life. This situation suggests a need to help the man grieve his losses, while at the same time, help him build new support systems, both inside and outside the family. Specifically, this necessitates working through his relationships with his aging father and/or mother as well as coming to terms with his teen-age children.

4. Activity: How does the man during MLT organize his time? Does he make productive use of the time available? Is he satisfied in his work or is there a role deficit? How does he relate to his supervisors; to his peers; to the younger workers who are challenging him for the material rewards and status provided by society? What organizes his time other than work? Is he active in social, religious, and fraternal or other organizations or networks? Are they as viable an experience as a decade ago?

Bardwick (1975) states that one task at mid-life may be to create new "existential anchors." These are new roles or commitments, such as a new job, new relationships, new tasks, which will anchor him to reality because they force him to cope with real tasks and real people. These new anchors become the central organizers of his time. They have a tie to his past, and yet are an integral part of his new expectations for himself, and thus are necessary if the tasks of MLT are to be successfully completed. Many men seem to be evaluating and sometimes rejecting the anchor of competetive

success at the same time their wives are rejecting the anchor of parenthood in favor of the anchor of work and competitive success. More specifically, a man at MLT may re-evaluate the organization of his activity structure in terms of the meaning and payoff it will have for him during the next decade or two as he confronts and plans for retirement. Old activities which have lost their sustenance value may be discarded while new ones may be begun. Special attention should be given to indications of social withdrawal which may lead to the pattern of psycho-social decline.

5. Play: How does the man at MLT take a "time-out" from the responsibilities of life? Can he play as well as work? Can he enjoy doing things, at home and with friends? Does he take regular vacations and time-off from work to allow himself to become refreshed and rejuvenated so he has the energy to cope with all the demands of the transitional period?

One of the most sobering findings of the Grant Study about the effect of having a "poor" childhood upon mid-life adjustment, was that these men would be unable to play! Consequently they are likely to lock themselves into their work world and become emotionally isolated and morose as the years pass. Common to many men (Rosenberg & Farrel, 1975) and Bardwick (1975) was a denial of the anger they experienced as a result of their increasing negative outlook and a lack of control over their environment. Some men turned to alcohol as a major mechanism for escaping the sense of depression which emerged as these changes took place. In which case, he may become part of the "beer and pretzel" set in front of the TV to pass the time. Yet, he often harbors ideas of an occupational comeback by which he will recoup his losses and once again become a pleasant, fun-loving person who is enjoying life.

This image of male MLT suggests two approaches for the counselor. First, it may necessitate helping the man "repair" his childhood and bring

him along through some developmental tasks so he can learn to play again. Secondly, and even more important perhaps, it indicates a need for effective parenting workshops for parents, not only when their children are small, but at other times as well when the child and the parent enter various stages or unfoldings of the life cycle. Then perhaps, the repair job will be less of an awesome task with less pain for those involved.

6. Existentiality: What is the meaning of his life? What is the meaning of his death? Will anyone care or grieve if he is not around? Are his role increments (being promoted, getting a raise, having a satisfying relationship) greater than his role deficits (getting divorced, being fired, being trapped in a dead-end job or marriage, children leaving home)? This reassessment may lead to the difficult realization that he has not lived up to his early aspirations and may produce disenchantment and force for change. Neugarten (1976) discusses a shift in time perspective that occurs during MLT. "Time is now a two-edged sword. To some of my friends, it acts as a prod; to others, a brake. It adds a certain anxiety, but I must also say it adds a certain zest in seeing how much pleasure can still be obtained, how many new activities can be undertaken" (p. 97). Brim (1976) found "one of the major psychological tasks for middle age is resignation to death, and a re-ordering of life priorities" (p. 6). If MLT tasks are accomplished successfully, the result may be a release of new energy, a re-awakening to new meaning for life and for self. If not, the result may be the despair that Erikson discusses.

The concept of "perception of control" and "choice" is central to all areas of an individual's life, his work, family, friends, community. One of the losses at mid-life seems to be a decline in his ability to control what is happening to him and a loss of choice of future alternatives. Thus, he may behave more rigidly and be more authoritarian in his actions toward

others. If however, he establishes some new existential anchors, these may provide him with a new locus of internal control, with more choice regarding the future, and he will perceive himself as having more power over his own destiny. He will believe that what he does makes a difference in what is happening. On the other hand, men who believe they are controlled by impersonal social forces, or by fate, have little choice and are likely to become more passive, apathetic, depressed and unwilling to make decisions when the opportunities arise. One task you as a counselor face is to accept him where he is and help him do the same. Focus on his positive strengths. Help him relearn the decision-making process and help him become assertive and take control of his own life without controlling others.

7. Health: How healthy the man is may be as much related to his adaptation to stress as his adaptation to physical impairment or disease. Is he as physically fit as he should be? Is he as mentally healthy as he could be? During the MLT, a man's temperament may seem to change, his behavior may become more erratic or unreasonable than in the past. Physically, he may tire more easily and lack energy. Less frequently, there are such psychosomatic conditions as occasional dizziness, constipation, urinary irregularity, itching, sweating, and tachycardia (abnormally fast heartbeat). Sexually, middle-aged men may seem to take longer to achieve an erection, or they may actually become impotent as they respond to the demands and changes of the time. For the man whose masculinity rests in his sexual prowess, these changes may have a traumatic effect on his self-concept and physical health. As he looks into the mirror, the awareness of physical limitations often comes with a shock to him as if these changes had occurred overnight. He may find that the amount of flesh on the face has increased; an extra fold of skin appears under his chin. His hairline

has receded or his hair has greyed, or both. So, he goes to a health spa or takes up jogging or plays handball; perhaps to ward off or hold back the aging process; perhaps in the hope of improving his health. During MLT, anxiety attacks and depressive episodes become more common. Inevitably, these anxieties filter through to his work and family, and he may receive criticism or a reprimand. Stress is one of the key conditions of man in MLT. How well he works and lives, both at that time and into old age, depends on his quality of adaptation to stress. Vaillant (1977) found in the Grant Study that health was seen as adaptation; the ability to move through the stresses of transition adaptively rather than maladaptively (e.g. without denial, regression, rigidity, or deferrment of appropriate tasks).

Implications

Throughout this paper, I have tried to present some of the perspectives about men in MLT. Certainly, some of it is speculative and tentative and its symptoms and impact varies in intensity from little if any, to extremely severe. Much awaits the substantiation of further research. However, based upon the written materials available, my counseling experience, and my own confrontation with MLT, I do think, along with the others, that many if not most men do go through some type of MLT beginning in the late 30's on to perhaps age 50. To some extent, it depends upon what chronological age each man enters each developmental or unfolding period. For some, this transition has been severe and the world they have lived in for the past 20 years falls apart completely. Some deny its existence, but some patterns appear in their behavior. Others seem to adapt to the strains and with some remodeling, enter the last 25 or 30 years of their lives with renewed purpose and new exuberance.

In summary, I direct my comments to the counselors and helping professionals

who may encounter the mid-life male and his family. They reflect what I have previously discussed but with added recommendations about possible preventive interventions as well.

1. Choice: Try to help your client regain control of his life. Control presents greater opportunity for choice and people who feel in control will believe that their actions and decisions make a difference. They will likely move through MLT more adaptively. Help him regain control of his vocational life. The most useful construct for understanding career development and job satisfaction is congruence; how his needs, interests, and preferences "fit" with the opportunities and rewards offered by the work environment. A man may be confused during this time which may lead him to make incongruent choices. Also, choices which were congruent at an earlier period can become incongruent if his interests, values and needs change. Help him explore the incongruence between his person and his job. Help him consider his resources and set new goals based upon the alternatives considered and means to achieve them.

2. Intimacy: Intimacy is the first major developmental crisis of adulthood. Failure to resolve that crisis results in isolation and disturbs further development. Defining interpersonal intimacy as a relationship characterized by similarity, reciprocity and compatibility, Lowenthal and Weiss (1976) maintain that "close interpersonal relationships serve as a resource against life's crises" (p. 14). Most studies on marital relationships show a decrease in companionship, a loss of common interests, fewer demonstrations of affection and intimacy, sexual unresponsiveness and boredom; a general "disenchantment" over the life cycle. Intimacy, the goal of most married couples, can only occur through open communication with one another. Maintainance of intimacy is achievable only through learning the necessary skills of meaningful communication in a physically

and emotionally "safe" environment. It is the process of being intimate that is the key to having the reservoir of energy and patience to cope with life's transitions.

This suggests to me the necessity for "marital health" checkups and periodic marriage renewal experiences (e.g. Marriage Encounter, ACME enrichment groups, Couple Communication, Relationship Enhancement, etc.). I cannot stress enough the need for these types of experiences before MLT, as they can, I think, help the couple move toward an "actualized" marriage. The Family Home Evening developed by the LDS Church; Family Night, developed by the Catholics; Family Encounter, Family Renewal, Whole Families, etc. are sophisticated attempts to come to grips with building family networks, support and intimacy in a society whose policies do not encourage this kind of activity. Helping the man, his wife and his family make satisfactory adjustments during MLT is not an easy task for the counselor, particularly as the arenas of work and interpersonal relations shift in saliency throughout the life span. Adults can "recycle" several times during their lives and need guidance in making such transitions. (See Perspectives on Counseling Adults: Issues and Skills, by Schlossberg, Troll and Leibowitz, Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1978, for a detailed presentation of activities and skills you can use with clients.)

3. Understanding: Use your knowledge of adult development to the client's advantage. Help him build on his personal and relationship strengths. Help him accept that this transitional period is "normal" and that changes are part of the process of adult development. Work with him on his defense and coping mechanisms for adapting to change. Listen to and support him. Encourage him to express his feelings of pain and his feelings of pleasure. Recognize that even a positive change may constitute severe stress at this time. An increase in freedom and autonomy as well as

a decrease in choice and control, may produce anxiety and uncertainty. Through effective listening and responding, encourage him to be gentle in his judgment of himself. Finally, your training can help him anticipate other major transitions, particularly retirement, and he can begin now to plan for it in a systematic way so he has a positive attitude toward it and toward those persons whom he likely will experience it with.

It is the task of the therapist to help the man engage the giants, the myths, the false ideas of his life and not just stand blindly with the forces of change. You, the researchers, the counselors, the helping professionals, are the "mid-wives" of change, and of re-birth. You must become the change agent because the person who is changing is likely to become the resistor of change. The task at this time is to help the man integrate the best aspects of his life, to re-model his life, not to destroy relationships, ideals, etc. We must help him identify his potentials and teach him the transformation skills so he can solve his own problems in the future.

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